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COMMITTEE ON NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Provision of documentation to the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations

Note by the Secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 1996 session, the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations recommended to the Economic and Social Council that the documentation of the Committee be issued in all six official languages of the Council, from within existing resources (see E/1996/102, sect. I, draft decision III).

2. Following informal consultations, on that draft decision, the Council, at its resumed substantive session of 1996, had before it a draft decision (E/1996/L.57) on the matter. In that draft decision the Secretariat was requested to prepare for the Council at its organizational session for 1997 an assessment of ways to implement the decision within existing resources. In its decision 1996/318 of 20 November 1996, the Council decided to postpone consideration of the draft decision contained in document E/1996/L.57 to its organizational session for 1997.

3. The present note provides background information on the question and the assessment mentioned in draft decision E/1996/L.57. It is submitted to the Council for its information.

* E/1997/2.

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II. COMMITTEE ON NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

4. The Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations was established by the Council in its resolution 3 (II) of 21 June 1946 (see E/1996/97) as a standing committee. The Committee carries out the functions assigned to it by the Council in pursuance of Article 71 of the Charter of the United Nations, which states that the Council "may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence". The original terms of reference of the Committee were set out in Council resolution 288 B (X) of 27 February 1950, which was superseded by Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 25 May 1968. The current terms of reference of the Committee are set out in Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996. In accordance with Council decision 1995/304 of 26 July 1995, the Committee meets on an annual basis.

5. The Committee was originally known as "the Committee on Arrangements for Consultation with Non-governmental Organizations (short title: Council NGO Committee)" (Council resolution 3 (II), sect. II, para. 1) and was composed of five members. It now has 19 members (Council resolution 1981/50 of 20 July 1981 and rule 80 of the rules of procedure of the Council (E/5715/Rev.2)). In Council resolution 1996/31, it is referred to as the "Council Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations".

III. DOCUMENTATION OF THE COMMITTEE

6. Since the inception of the Committee, its documentation has been provided in English, French and Spanish, which are defined in rule 32 of the rules of procedure of the Council as "the working languages of the Council".

7. The primary documents that are considered by the Committee at its annual session are the following:

(a) Annotated provisional agenda;

(b) Quadrennial reports submitted by non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council, categories I and II;

(c) Quadrennial reports: follow-up to decisions taken by the Committee at its previous session;

(d) Memoranda of the Secretary-General on deferred applications for consultative status;

(e) New applications for consultative status;

(f) New requests for reclassification of consultative status.

IV. BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS

8. The volume of pre-session documentation for the 1997 session of the Committee is conservatively estimated at 1,400 pages. It is on that basis that the statement of the Secretary-General on the programme budget implications of draft resolution E/1996/L.57 (E/1996/L.58) was prepared. In that statement the Secretary-General indicated that implementation of the draft decision, that is, provision of all documentation to the Committee in six official languages, "would entail additional conference servicing in 1997 estimated at full cost in the amount of $860,700".

9. Assuming that two full months would be available for the translation of the Committee's pre-session documentation, 1,400 pages would increase the workload of the Arabic, Chinese and Russian Translation Services of the Office of Conference and Support Services by approximately 25 per cent over their maximum capacity, which is estimated taking into account all available budgeted resources. It would be possible, however, to issue the in-session documentation of the 1997 session of the Committee in all official languages without additional budgetary resources.

10. The issuance of all pre-session documentation of the Committee in all official languages, however, is a matter of another magnitude and could not be undertaken by the Office of Conference and Support Services without additional resources under section 26E (Conference services) of the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997, which was approved by the Assembly in its resolution 51/222 A of 18 December 1996. The same problem would, of course, arise in proposed programme budgets for future bienniums. A request by the Council for issuance of all documents for future sessions of the Committee in all official languages would entail significant budgetary requirements.

11. The problem is to find a means of reconciling, on the one hand, the expressed need of the Committee to have its documentation in all official languages and, on the other, the unavailability in the current biennium of sufficient resources to accomplish that. The Council is also reminded of the provision in the draft decision that its implementation should be within existing resources.

V. CONCLUSION

12. The Secretariat wishes to propose a restructuring of the documentation of the Committee in order to reduce it to a volume that could be issued in all official languages without recourse to additional financial resources.

13. Following the pattern used at the recent major United Nations conferences in the economic, social and related fields for the accreditation of non-governmental organizations, the Secretariat would prepare a summary of each new application for consultative status and of each new request for reclassification of consultative status, and would indicate its recommendation as to acceptance or rejection of the request. The complete submissions from non-governmental organizations would be made available as requested to the

Committee in the language of submission. A similar pattern would also be established for deferred applications for consultative status.

14. Reports on follow-up to the decisions taken by the Committee at its previous session, including those on quadrennial reports, would be issued as at present, but in all official languages.

15. The quadrennial reports of non-governmental organizations in consultative status, categories I and II, would need to be limited in some manner in order for them to appear in all languages. The Secretariat would suggest that consideration be given to a limit of two pages maximum for each non-governmental organization.

16. With these measures, it should be possible to keep the pre-session documentation of the Committee within a limit of 600 to 700 pages, which would allow translation into all six official languages.